

CAMDEN DOWNTOWN PLAN WORKING GROUP

Minutes of Meeting

January 11, 2012

PRESENT:

There were sixteen people attending including four members of the Lachman Architects and Planners Team, and representatives from all of the organizations comprising the Town of Camden's Team. The attached January Working Group lists the names of those attending, their affiliations and email addresses.

1. SETTING THE STAGE

The Community and Economic Development Committee (CEDAC) relied on guidance from the Camden Comprehensive Plan to develop their vision of a dynamic downtown that would foster development and the creation of new jobs. The Town contracted with the Lachman Group to develop a Master Plan to guide that development. This is the second meeting of the Working Group, and members of the Lachman Team are here to provide an update on progress to date, and to discuss the proposal for the next steps in the process:

- WHO'S DOING WHAT: Dennis Lachman
Project Coordinator: Camden Development Director Brian Hodges
The Lachman Team:
 - Building Assessment: Dennis Lachman, Architect, with Megan Cullen, Architectural Preservation Consultant
 - Economics: Rodney Lynch, Planner
 - Streetscape: Regina Leonard, Landscape Architect, with Mike Sabatini, Engineer
- APPROACH AND WORK PLAN: Dennis Lachman:
 - ❖ Since the Kick-off Meeting in November the Team has been gathering the background information they needed to begin the development of the Plan concept. This second meeting with the Team is to review their findings and get the Working Group's feedback.
 - ❖ The next step is the first Public Forum on January 26 in the Opera House. At that meeting the Working Group will introduce the project to the Town, relay the information the Team has gathered and ask the townspeople "What Do You Think?"
 - ❖ In early February, the Team will discuss revisions to the Plan that were made based on the comments gathered at the Forum and additional information gathered by the Team. That revised Plan will then be presented at a second Public Forum where townspeople will be asked: "Did We Hear You?" Those comments will be presented to, and discussed with, the Working Group and incorporated into the final Plan. This will be presented to the Select Board for approval by the end of March.

❖ The Team is on schedule with their Work Plan which calls for feedback on the Building Inventory, the Economic Analysis, and the Streetscape Concept Design at this meeting.

• **PROJECT AREA:** Regina Leonard:

❖ The original project area was adjusted and now includes the Knox Mill properties, the Library and grounds, Wayfarer and Steamboat Landing. The area of focus for design and planning *does not* include the area from the Library grounds around the harbor to Wayfarer and Steamboat Landing; these areas will be treated verbally only.

QUESTIONS:

Oscar Verest is concerned that the parking situation along Sea Street which negatively impacts residents of that street, drivers on the street and Wayfarer's business, needs to be addressed in some detail; will that happen? Rodney Lynch heard the same concerns during his interview with Wayfarer's CEO Susan Howland – traffic flow needs to be addressed because of its impact on Wayfarer's commercial needs. Pete Brown reminded the group that the use of Steamboat Landing by boaters will only increase as the harbor becomes busier. Mr. Lachman replied that Sea Street is included for review in the project, but that it will not be assessed as deeply for remedies as other project areas.

2. ACTIVITY TO DATE

❖ **BUILDINGS:** Denis Lachman:

Mr. Lachman provided an example of the eventual Building Inventory he will produce when all the data has been collected. Mr. Lachman will build on information gathered for CEDAC's *Economic Development Analysis & Action Plan* last January – that is where some of the data in the example come from, as well as the Town's 2010 proposal for a TIF District. He will provide information for each commercial property in the project area with regard to: Total Net of Leasable square footage; 1st Floor square footage; 1st Floor current Use and Comments; 1st Floor – Number of employees; and job types. There will be additional information provided in the inventory as well, including the ownership and specific location information as well as photos of 168 properties. But, the data regarding the space available for use are the important components of the building inventory.

QUESTIONS:

Where will the figures on the numbers of seasonal employees come from? Mr. Lynch replied that the information on employees, which is the responsibility of Megan Cullen, will eventually be divided into Full Time, Part Time and Seasonal categories. Mr. Fullilove asked where the information on square footage came from. Mr. Wilson replied that was available in the tax base, and Mr. Fullilove asked if the information on numbers of employees was available as well; it is not. Mr. Lynch replied that some employee information will come from interviews, but that sometimes it will be a best guess based on businesses similar in size and nature. Mr. Bookham notified the Team that the Chamber can help supply some of these figures, at least for their membership.

1 Lowrie Sargent asked if the properties in the Project Area that are residential in nature could
2 be noted when they can be converted to commercial use without a change in zoning; Mr.
3 Lachman can add that information with Steve Wilson's assistance.

4 ❖ **ECONOMICS:** Rodney Lynch:

5
6 Mr. Lynch also relied on information in CEDAC's *Economic Development Analysis &*
7 *Action Plan* which contained a good inventory of current businesses. He has conducted
8 interviews and used his best guess to rank priorities based on these conversations.
9

10 ❖ **PRIORITY CONCERNS:**

- 11 > Parking – both finding spaces and the need for a parking garage
- 12 > Signage to get people off Main Street
- 13 > Knox Mill redevelopment
- 14 > Finding and creating additional/larger conference space
- 15 > Keeping the Town's Quality of Life to help compensate business owners for a
- 16 poor business climate

17
18 • **SECONDARY CONCERNS:**

- 19 > Bring more people Downtown – both visitors and residents.
- 20 > Keep high-drawing facilities from leaving Town: The extent to which downtown
- 21 businesses suffered when the Y and the High School left downtown may have
- 22 become exaggerated over time, and may just be coincidental with a downturn
- 23 > There is more to the Downtown than just Main and Elm Streets.
- 24 > An aging business community means there could be several owners retiring,
- 25 perhaps even selling property in the near future.
- 26 > Continue the emphasis on small businesses coming to Town; when large ones
- 27 leave it is disastrous.
- 28 > There is a need for lower rents to reduce competition for businesses with other
- 29 towns. In addition the buildings are old and maintenance is more expensive.
- 30 > Promote the River as an asset.
- 31 > Promote the service economy spinning off from the tourist industry.
- 32 > Find a higher and better use for the Public Landing.
- 33 > Town government needs to play a role in facilitating economic growth, not hinder
- 34 it.
- 35 > Maintain the Downtown's attractive appearance.
- 36 > Develop a direction for Camden that makes will make it different than
- 37 neighboring towns – a niche.
- 38 > Create more diversity in the businesses located Downtown.

39
40 • **TERTIARY CONCERNS:**

- 41 > Capitalize on promoting Maine and regionally produced products.
- 42 > Create opportunities for small business start-up.
- 43 > Address the lack of night time attractions and activities for visitors – and for
- 44 residents.
- 45 > Create office space with modern technology.
- 46 > Handicapped sidewalks and crosswalks to encourage elderly foot traffic.
- 47 > Attract talented, smart retirees to the area and take advantage of their skills.

- 1 ➤ Develop a marketing campaign on the quality of life here – why people move
- 2 here.
- 3 ➤ Attract and develop a dependably skilled employee base.

4
5 Mr. Lynch will finish his interviews and filter out the trends in responses. Then he will
6 look at sources of funding for financing parking (a garage) and creating more conference space
7 by looking at public/private partnerships as well as grants and other funding.

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9 COMMENTS:

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11 Peter Gross: Wants to see discussion about the economic development incentives of
12 reusing Town property; the benefits and the losses of moving the Town Office for example. The
13 Town-owned parking lot on Washington Street: should it be developed to encourage foot traffic
14 to come down the street and around the corner? He also wants to know where the Team would
15 suggest providing new business “incubator” space.

16
17 Oscar Verest thinks moving the Town Office to the Elm Street School building would re-
18 invigorate that section of Elm Street all the way to Downtown. Perhaps one answer to parking
19 needs is to build a garage with shops at street level; it would provide more business space –
20 perhaps cheaper space – and make the street level more interesting.

21
22 Dave Jackson noted that the older, larger conferences based in Camden – The Camden
23 Conference for example, very slowly grew before purposefully expanding regionally to attract
24 more attendees at outlying venues. Those who want to keep all the conference business in
25 Camden, and not out-source conference space and rooms, probably don’t have to worry; start-up
26 conferences coming to the area are going to be small enough that they can be accommodated
27 here.

28
29 Mr. Lachman asked if there is a source of information – a resource person to send
30 conference inquiries to. Dan Bookham said the Chamber gets lots of inquiries and has a good
31 listing of where additional space can be found. Steve Wilson noted that the Opera House
32 Manager is also compiling that kind of information so she can become more of a resource to
33 people wanting to use the Town’s facilities. Addressing concerns voiced by Working Group
34 members, Mr. Wilson replied that the manager is also trying to become more pro-active in
35 soliciting conference business and boosting her capacity to host larger events. She realizes the
36 importance of keeping the related business of lodging and dining in Town as well.

37
38 Mr. Gross, coming back to the concept of re-using Town property, asked the Team to
39 please look at the Public Landing as well as the current Chamber building to see if there is a
40 better use for these properties. Mr. Bookham informed the group that the Chamber staff agrees
41 that they would serve their purpose much better in a location somewhere south on Route One,
42 perhaps someplace closer to the Town Line, where they can be more visible, and more
43 accessible, to arriving visitors.

44
45 • **STREETSCAPE:** Regina Leonard:

- 46
47 ❖ **GENERAL APPROACH:** 1st: Research, review and understand the Town’s
48 resources and needs; 2nd: Inventory and assess infrastructure including sidewalks,

streetscape, circulation patterns, pedestrian safety and public spaces; 3rd: Create goals and objects for improvements understanding the constraints and defining possibilities.

- ❖ **GUIDING PRINCIPLES AND GOALS** (as suggested, in part, by the CEDAC *Economic Development Analysis & Action Plan*) : 1) Leverage Camden's "Quality of Life" to attract and retain workforce by preserving, enhancing and creating recreational and natural resource-based opportunities; 2) Maintain and preserve the community balance and sense of place. Develop a Riverwalk along the Megunticook River to move visitors off Main Street; maintain the harbor as a high-end tourism attraction; expand and enhance pedestrian and sidewalk spaces while calming traffic; and improve neighborhood interconnectivity with a series of trails and bikeways; and 3) Enhance the quality of life by providing more opportunities for recreation by implementing the Bicycle and Pedestrian Master Plan of 2007.
- ❖ **PURPOSE OF THE PLAN:** Create a vital and vibrant year-round downtown by improving way-finding for car and foot traffic; enhancing streetscapes and infrastructure; and capitalizing on the historic downtown.
- ❖ **MAJOR ISSUES & CONSIDERATIONS:** Traffic – promote side street activity to relieve Main Street and calm Route One traffic; Parking – easier to find with improved signage; Signage – directional and information signage needs improvement; Best Use of Town Properties – consider reuses for Chamber building, Town Office, Public Landing and some of the on-street parking spaces.
- ❖ **Opportunities for Enhanced Pedestrian Circulation Patterns:** Five locations would see pedestrian crossing strengthened as part of a new Riverwalk concept; the two Gateways - at the Library and Stop-and-Go - would include safe pedestrian crossings as well as enhanced intersection treatment, signage and traffic patterns at the Stop-and-Go; the Bayview Corridor would have new streetscape on both sides of Bay View Street, and the existing streetscape would be enhanced with trees; Plans for the Elm Street Corridor would call for reduced curb cuts where possible and enhanced sidewalks and crosswalks; the core Downtown would see crosswalk enhancements, street trees, benches, and directional signage, with wider sidewalks as possible; and, at the main intersection there would be strengthened pedestrian visibility and safer Route 1 crossings, vehicular circulation patterns would be clarified, and there would be additional and improved signage directing drivers to public parking and other destinations.
- ❖ **Opportunities for Increased Pedestrian Circulation:** Enhance shared vehicle-pedestrian route as key connection to Harbor Park from Riverwalk; Enhance public street corridor and pedestrian zone from Mechanic Street to hotel; Enhance connection between Public Landing and Camden Yacht Club; Enhance connections to Multi-use trail; Strengthen Riverwalk connection along Mechanic Street from Main Street; Tie Harbor Park to Public Landing, River & Harborwalk.
- ❖ **Opportunities for Creating Additional Parking:** Make use of the Knox Mill lots if possible; at the Town's lot at Mechanic and Washington Streets increase and centralize parking in a new parking structure with retail/office space off Mechanic

1 street; at the Public Landing increase public open space and pedestrian access, limit
2 parking to waterfront uses, and reduce traffic congestion; Downtown - at the old Five
3 and Dime - preserve the existing surface parking, and consider infill development in
4 lot off Washington Street; at the Town's lot on Washington Street preserve the
5 existing surface parking for public use and Knox Mill overflow or future
6 redevelopment; and along Main Street, manage on-street parking to improve
7 pedestrian visibility and safety at defined crosswalks.
8

- 9 ❖ Riverwalk and Harborwalk Planning: The first question about the feasibility of the
10 Riverwalk is if the current infrastructure can be used or if it is too deteriorated to
11 save. Rejuvenating the Mill Pond area and creating that as a destination will move
12 people to that end. The Town might take another look at the Falls crossing as part of
13 a Harborwalk. If the Public Landing does become open space it will be even more
14 vital to be able to move pedestrians to and from that location. The Riverwalk would
15 involve the Town opening discussions with the owner of the current footbridge
16 because that is a vital link to move people from Mechanic Street.
17
18

19 Lowrie Sargent corrected the impression that the proposal for a Harborwalk had been
20 abandoned by the Town; in competing for Gateway funding to take the project forward, the
21 project lost out to CEDAC's proposal for the Business Development Plan. There was, and still
22 is, support for the project to move forward; even the Select Board recently voiced renewed
23 interest. Ms. Leonard has never seen the formal proposal, and is interested in any information
24 the Town might have on file.
25
26

27 DISCUSSION: 28

29 Ms. Leonard discussed the local resources that are available for pedestrian connections
30 from Downtown. She has been in touch with the Pathways Committee and is aware of the bike
31 path on Union Street. Pete Brown mentioned the bike and pedestrian pathway to the State Park;
32 he asks that the bicycle component of development not be forgotten— this area is nationally
33 known for its bike routes and this should be promoted. Ms. Leonard asked that members think
34 of other Community Resource Destinations – things that bring people here, places that can be
35 connected to pedestrian routes.
36

37 Susan Howland noted the inaccuracies in the listing and mapping of “Properties
38 Available for Development”: the January 2011 plan shows Wayfarer's parcel as available and it
39 is not; she asked that this be corrected.
40

41 Jim Fullilove asked if there were any tools in designing these plans to encourage certain
42 kinds of store to come to Town that will be residents Downtown to shop. It was noted that the
43 Maine Downtown Center recommends doing an inventory of services that a Town has, as well as
44 one of what the Town doesn't have but wants; then the Town develops a mission to intentionally
45 fill those slots. Brian Hodges informed the group that there is a real methodology available to
46 determine those needs.
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49

❖ PARKING:

Ms. Leonard asked about some of the parking issues: Some of the parallel spaces on Main Street are “dimensionally challenging”; should this be addressed or is the issue too sensitive. What about parking along Atlantic Avenue? Parking layout leaves a lot to be desired here, especially along the lower end of the street. Dave Jackson replied that when the addition to the Library was built, the Library, the Town and the Parking Committee all worked to preserve as much parking on the street as possible while providing for safe pedestrian access to the lower rooms. He is not sure what the response would be to recommending changes.

Oscar Verest asked why the Town doesn’t pursue making arrangements with churches like those on Elm and Chestnut Streets. Perhaps there is an option to develop paid parking so the churches could make some money when they are not using the lots themselves. The parking assessment based on current conditions shows the Town needs 86 additional spaces, and Ms. Leonard noted the challenge is that with so much of the available parking on street, that it makes it harder to find space than it would if parking were centralized. The Team assessed what would happen if the 84 spaces on the Town Landing parking were lost – where would more space be found nearby? Shared use of downtown church lots is one obvious answer. So is a parking garage and the best location for this seems to be the Town-owned lot on Mechanic Street. Susan Howland agreed that the closer to the Downtown parking is centralized, the better the chance of getting residents to come back downtown to do business – especially in the summer.

Dan Bookham said the goal of centralized parking is to provide cheap, or even free, long-term parking so people will stay longer. Oscar Verest asked about making more of the Main Street parking very short term, or even Pay for Parking, so spaces would open up on a regular basis. All agreed that the Fire Station lot should stay just as it is; this has helped move parking off Main Street and opened up parking there more than anything else the Town has done. Perhaps a way can be found to encourage employees to use the Knox Mill parking area making more parking closer to shopping available at the Fire Station. Moving the Town Office from Washington Street would free up the ten to fifteen spaces that Town employees use all day long.

Ms. Leonard asked about the status of the Elm Street School – would it ever be available as a site for the Town Office. Mr. Gross replied that the Montessori School has a long-term lease there with the School District, but when they leave, if the building is not to be used as a school any longer, the property would revert back to the Town. They may be looking for a new site now.

Mr. Gross suggested that when the final recommendation is made to the Town, the fact that the goal is to improve pedestrian and vehicular access be stressed. Improving the flow of traffic through the Downtown – getting rid of the bottlenecks – will be a huge selling point. Ms. Leonard asked how much does the parallel parking on Main Street reduce traffic flow; all agreed it does, but it is the double parked service trucks that are a bigger problem. There are no spaces designated as loading areas and they parking on both sides of the street – sometimes across from each other which makes the road virtually one lane.

1 Mr. Verest ended the discussion by saying that he hoped *everything* would be on the table
2 for consideration – even making Bayview Street one way – everything needs to be looked to find
3 solutions.

4 **3. MASTER PLAN WEB SITE:** Brian Hodges

5
6 The Downtown Master Plan home page will be up and running on the Town Web Site
7 within a day or two. There, the Plan will be introduced along with the history, a discussion of
8 the approach introduced here today, and an invitation to the public to “Get Engaged!” The
9 purpose of creating the site is to introduce the proposal to the community *before* the first Public
10 Forum so they can come to the meeting already informed. Ms. Howland recommended that
11 some of the concept proposals shown today be made available on the site and Mr. Brown
12 suggested that both Working Group agendas should be posted along with member contact
13 information.

14 15 **4. COMMUNITY MEETINGS:** Dennis Lachman

16
17 The purpose of the two Public Forums is to hear from all citizens and get their feedback:
18 First we ask “What Do You Think?”; we listen, make changes and come back with the revisions
19 and ask them to confirm - “Did We Hear You?” The meetings will be hosted by the Town
20 Working Group, and they need to think about how to invite the public – what kind of outreach
21 needs to be done in the short time to the Forum? Then they need to discuss how to manage and
22 balance the meeting time for input and output. He suggests opening with a 30 minute
23 informational session to introduce the Plan and the concepts, taking into consideration how much
24 information those attending can digest. Then the audience will break into small groups for
25 discussion answering the question: “What are your top three concerns?” Leave the possibilities
26 wide open and see what trends are evidenced when the responses are reported to the meeting.
27 The Working Group will prepare the feedback from the meeting and let people know what
28 happened.

29
30 Mr. Lachman suggested that the breakout groups could be formed easily without having
31 to move people very far from their seats; simply announce people should reach out to five or six
32 people seated nearest them and form a group. Someone should be designated as a list-keeper to
33 take notes and be ready to read the results. Mr. Hodges suggested having an overhead slide with
34 a list of some of the priorities that Mr. Lynch found just so the audience has some idea of what
35 others in Town are thinking. Mr. Gross likes the idea that the small group discussions at the first
36 meeting will be left wide open so they can see what new ideas might come out. The second
37 meeting, however, should be much more focused. If good ideas come up that aren’t really
38 apropos to this project, they can be “parked” somewhere for future discussion without being
39 dismissed – this makes contributors feel their ideas are valuable and they are much more willing
40 to continue participating. Mr. Sargent suggested a sign-in sheet with a place for people who
41 want to stay informed to leave their email addresses to add to an email update list.

42
43 Mr. Wilson suggested keeping the web-site open for a few days after the meeting as a
44 place where feedback can be collected after-the-fact. There may be those who couldn’t attend or
45 those who think of more they want to add. Mr. Fullilove suggested that all the announcements of
46 the Forum should send people to the website to do some homework before they come to the
47 meeting. Mr. Hodges distributed copies of a Community Network Analysis – a listing of contacts
48 that should be made to reach people influential in Town business and politics. He suggested

1 members should contact everyone they know on the list and issue a personal invitation; if people
2 get several invitations they will realize this is an important issue.

3
4 Mr. Hodges is meeting with *Village Soup* and hopes they will run an article; the Town
5 will do a Press Release in any case. The *Free Press* should also be contacted.

6 7 **5. WRAP UP**

8
9 All agreed that progress has been made in the development of the Plan. Ms Howland is
10 pleased with the way the Public Forum will be organized, noting that history in Town has shown
11 that it is not good to get too far ahead of the public when proposals like this are being developed.

12
13 Mr. Bookham believes it is important to find a mechanism to test the social and anecdotal
14 comments before they are accepted as data. Some of these situations are important to recognize,
15 but they need to be put in context with to what really did happen.

16
17 Bernice Berger is skeptical of the dynamics of the Forum; it will be interesting to see how
18 everything is coordinated. She is surprised to see the emphasis placed on the Riverwalk plays in
19 the concept. She is not sure this is a good use of resources; there are more important projects
20 that need work first.

21
22 Mr. Verest's biggest concern is those with the mindset that want things to stay the way
23 they are. It is time to make some adaptations to the times, and he hopes that people will be
24 opened minded to some unusual ideas – like the Harborwalk Bridge. If the Group knows ahead
25 of time that there will be negative reactions to certain proposals, they should anticipate what
26 those concerns will be and be prepared to address those concerns.

27
28 Mr. Jackson thinks the odds are good that if the Public Forum is structured as well as the
29 Working Group meetings, it will be successful. He, too, is surprised by the emphasis in the Plan
30 on the Riverwalk: the proposed route does not seem nature to him. Ms. Howland agrees. Mr.
31 Lynch thinks the Riverwalk is well-integrated into a plan to bring foot traffic off Main Street.
32 Ms. Leonard responded by saying that she realizes the area is not that attractive now, and she
33 understands the skepticism. But the trend is to include public recreational opportunities near
34 Downtowns to draw visitors who are opting out of using cars to get around; bike trails and
35 walking trails – multi-use pathways – are very popular and heavily used where they exist. As for
36 the proposed pedestrian routes, when the nuts and bolts of the streetscape are known, the plan
37 will focus in on actual routes, and those shown in the Conceptual Plan may well change.

38
39 Mr. Lachman said the last thing the Team wants is for those at the Forum to think that
40 this Plan is people from away telling local people what to do; that is why this is the Town's
41 meeting to hear from the public whether or not they like this idea – what is it that the local
42 people want?

43
44 Mr. Fullilove believes the concept is well-conceived and is a good start. He hopes there
45 will be a chance at the second Forum to hear new ideas from those who didn't attend the first
46 meeting. There should be a way to get their feedback.

47
48 There being no further business the meeting adjourned at 4:30 pm.

1
2 Respectfully submitted,
3 Jeanne Hollingsworth, Recording Secretary

JANUARY CAMDEN DOWNTOWN PLAN WORKING GROUP

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